Whose Voice is Missing? From Storytelling to Transformation in Teaching and Learning

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Each year, over a hundred students undergo the process of putting together an application dossier for the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STHLE)’s prestigious 3M National Student Fellowship (3MNSF). The 15-page dossier includes a description of leadership qualities and experiences as well as a description of educational challenges, and notably, an answer to the massive question: “What are the biggest challenges facing post-secondary education in Canada, as a whole? If you had the resource capacity, how would you implement concrete solutions to these challenges?”

For each conference, ten 3M National Student Fellows are chosen and represent a diverse cross-section of disciplines, schools, and geographic areas. These students are invited to attend the STHLE annual conference where they are introduced to each other for the first time and tasked with the responsibility of developing a closing plenary over the following four days. Rather than take a prescriptive approach to educational change, this year’s group—comprising biologists, artists, and business and nursing students among others—decided to utilize their plenary to voices and encourage a more open dialogue with those attending their conference. The journey was both collaborative and transformative for the National Student Fellows, and encouraged the opening of a rich dialogue between students and teachers at the end of the plenary. This paper is a transcript of the plenary and represents the group’s first step towards contributing a sustainable change to the system. Responses to the work are encouraged and will be welcomed as a part of the group’s ongoing commitment to transforming education in Canada into the future.

Whose voice is missing? - Amy Blanding

“I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change; I am changing the things I cannot accept.” (quote by Angela Davis) —Cara Samuel

She told me she was stupid. She told me she will never be successful. She told me that we would never be seen as equals. —Chloé Soucy

When I arrived in the Arctic, an Inuit Elder asked, “How many footsteps do you have on this land?” —Debbie (Deborah) Jenkins

I grew up with an education system that silenced the voices of the Sinixt First Nation whose territory we were learning on. —Michael Graeme

Dii Xaayda ča ga. Dii jaada ga. Hła uu gyaaga hlčang-gulxa iiji – I am Haida. I am a woman. I am my work. —Yahlnaaw / Aaron Grant
My grandfather, whom I never got to meet, inspired me to represent the voiceless, those who have been silenced. —Mohammad Asadi Lari

I am an engineer. I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a human. —Alexandra Meikleham

Land Acknowledgement: Taadsxwa. In my Skidegate Haida language, Taadsxwa translates to “welcome” in regard to welcoming a new or old friend into your home. Although I am not from this land of the Abenaki peoples and Wabanaki Confederacy, I understand the importance of acknowledging the land on which we are on. I would like to say Haawa (Thank You) to the peoples of this land for allowing us to learn, grow, and present here. - Yahlnaaw

Introduction

If you walk through a forest on any given day, there is the possibility that you will find yourself treading on fungi. Popping up here and there will likely be a variety of oddly shaped and differently coloured mushrooms. On the surface, they often stand alone. But if you dig just below the surface you will find a networking system that is so vast, so interconnected, and so significant; a web of mycelium that singlehandedly regulates the earth’s ecosystems.

Our 3M student cohort comprises profoundly unique individuals. We all have vastly different stories as to how we ended up in this place. But it didn’t take much digging below the surface to discover how interconnected our stories are, and how many synergies exist in our approach to educational leadership.

As a group coming together and delivering a plenary panel, we seek to answer questions that affect all of our work. How are we interconnected? What common threads are woven throughout our stories? What problems do we share? What expertise can we draw on? And how do we collectively work together to build something greater than the 2018 cohort—something that will shift the course of the teaching and learning community?

What became clear through this process was the importance of storytelling, a long-standing and wildly effective form of communication that has been sorely underutilized in Western educational institutions. Stories connect us with our past, with our emotions, and they draw communities together. Here, we share some of our stories with the goal of calling attention, and perhaps bring a new perspective to some of the big questions plaguing the post-secondary world today. Questions many people in the teaching and learning community are trying to answer. Questions that we are going to begin unpacking: Whose voice is missing? What makes your work, your work? How can we engage and support our communities, share knowledge, and build collaborations? And how can we ensure the voices of marginalized people are heard and honoured in higher education?

What makes your work, your work? (Mohammad, Alexandra, Yahlnaaw)

Yahlnaaw: Myself situated in my culture, language, and community.
Mohammad: Balancing my role as a global citizen, and as a member of my community.
Alex: Having my values reflected in my work.

Where have you come from?
Yahlnaaw: Jah! Xaaydaga ’las! Yahlnaaw han.nuu dii kii.ca ga. Hl.aagilda Xaayda Gwaii sda.uu hll iiging. Lax Kxeen sda.uu hll na.uu dii gun.
Way.yad.uu ’Nizdeh Nekeyoh Hohudel’e’h Baiyoh’, Prince George guu.uu hll naa.uu-dii ga. T’aawgiwat han.nuu Naanaga kii.ca ga.
Jaaskwaan han.nuu dii

(translation): Hey! Wonderful people! My name is Yahlnaaw which broadly translates to “leads an exceptional life.” I am from Skidegate, Haida Gwaii. I was born and raised in Prince Rupert on Ts’msyen territory. I am attending post-secondary education at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George on Lheidli T’enneh territory. My Grandmother’s name is T’aawgiiwat. My Mother’s name is Jaaskwaan. My father’s name is Bruce. My sister’s name is Giidahlguuhleay. I am a member of the Raven Clan and we have many crests as we are from a Chief’s family.

Two years ago I was accepted into the Psychology Honours Program at UNBC supervised by the current Chair of the department, Dr. Cindy Hardy, and co-supervised by a close friend and colleague, Edōsdi / Dr. Judith Thompson. I wanted to combine my two academic passions of First Nations Studies and Psychology and came up with the research topic, “Decolonizing Psychology through Story” as language and story revitalization are crucial aspects of my research. After months (and many sticky-note mind maps) I was sitting on my bedroom floor and realized that my proposed research topic was not only difficult to put together - but it was impossible.

Psychology is a colonized discipline. Psychology came to the land we now call Canada with the colonizers. Therefore, in my opinion, Psychology cannot be decolonized because it was never colonized in the first place because it is a colonial discipline. If I "decolonized” Psychology, it could not be Psychology anymore—it would have to be something else.

This lead me to think about colonization as a whole. A prominent part of colonization is enforcing one’s worldview onto another person’s in which the imposed worldview does not belong. In a sense, by enforcing an Indigenous worldview onto an area of study in which it did not belong in the first place, I could be doing something along the lines of colonizing Psychology. However, it must be noted that Edōsdi and I state in our “Decolonizing our Colonized Minds: Educational Systems” presentation and paper that true decolonization revolves around land and land repatriation.

This made me think about why I wanted to do Psychology in the first place: to work with Indigenous nations. There are studies which indicate that Indigenous Nations, rich in culture and language, have very low rates of suicide whereas Indigenous Nations who have had their culture and language stolen have very high rates of suicide. The reason for languishing culture and language is due to colonization. Therefore, by working with Indigenous Nations in regard to Psychology, I would be using a colonized area of study to work with the peoples suffering the effects of colonization—which was not going to work. We all have different roots, but in our work together we have discovered how important this has been to guide our inspirations.

My ideas and realizations above have also been a prominent component of Edōsdi and my presentation and upcoming paper, “Decolonizing our Colonized Minds: Educational Systems” as this revelation process was the beginning of truly decolonizing my colonized mind. These revelations are also discussed in my 3M application package.

Mohammad: Just like Yahlnaaw, my roots have played a fundamental role in guiding my aspiration. I spent most of my childhood in the UK. Yet, when I was 10, my mom gave up a faculty position at Cambridge for me and my sister to experience life in our homeland: Iran.

I couldn’t be more grateful for her sacrifice. It gave me a chance to reconnect with my roots, my family. It allowed me to find my biggest inspirations in life: my grandmothers.
My maternal grandmother broke off with her family for two decades, because they couldn’t take her wanting a higher education for her four children. Her three daughters and one son all became either physicians or pharmacists. She is the inspiration for perseverance and the value of education, and the incredible role of a great matriarch.

My paternal grandmother on the other hand was an MP of twelve years, in the Iranian Parliament. One of only three females. She lost her husband, and raised her four children. She lost two of her three sons to cancer, yet she is one of the strongest people I’ve ever known, but also one of the most humble. She is an inspiration in our extended community for how humility and legacy can go hand in hand.

For those in this room, and those outside, our roots play a critical role in who we are.

So who are you?

Alex: I’m an engineer. I’m an artist. I’m a woman. I’m a human. Since joining engineering I’ve tried to figure out how these interconnected and sometimes conflicting aspects of my “self” fit into a field that traditionally hasn’t had a space for this.

My name is Alex—which means people in my field often assume I’m a male before they meet me. For some reason I like it this way. It helps me to blend in and perhaps helps to prevent certain assumptions from being drawn. Thanks to my mentors I’ve learned how to better understand my role as a female within engineering, which is even today not fully embraced or accepted.

We are often encouraged to keep ourselves and our disciplines separate; however, I’ve discovered how important it is to me to see both of these aspects reflected in my work.

Mohammad: Just as you said Alex, I think our disciplines should also reflect who we are and how we understand the world to be. When I first wanted to pursue medicine in junior school, I saw medicine being limited to a science. Over the past three or four years, I’ve learned that it’s an art - an art of communication, an art of compassion, an art of humanity.

Yet, in the stubborn field of medicine, this can be neglected. I’ve tried to expand my horizons through involvements that aren’t traditionally associated with the field: civic engagement, social entrepreneurship, youth advocacy and the humanities. While there is resistance in some fields, there is also great hope.

Where are you going?

Alex: When I left my career to study engineering, I was lucky to meet key mentors who were critical in helping me to discover the scholarship of teaching and learning in engineering. This work has been incredible because it has allowed me to continue to engage my whole self, learn, and encourage others to do the same. It also has given me an opportunity to help others incorporate themselves into their work.

Last year I became a teaching assistant in a design class. One day I asked the students which global problem they were most passionate about solving. One student raised their hand and asked: “As an engineer, or as a human?”

Yahlnaaw: I am my work. I am my community, my work is important. I believe that I have 3 mentors: My Nanaay (Grandmother), Edōsdi / Dr. Judith Thompson, and Dr. Heather Smith. My Nanaay helped me realize that maybe we do not need Psychology and that maybe we need our language – the foundations of culture and community. I then began seriously learning my Skidegate Haida language. Nanaay tells me that I am my community and I am my language. Edōsdi tells me that I am my work. Heather tells me that my work is important.

That’s what makes my work my work… So whose voice is missing? Well, in this case, it was my own voice. By learning my language and guidance from
my mentors, I am able to regain my voice—my language—as a Skidegate Haida woman. In Skidegate Haida, we have a word for language which is Kil. Our word for voice is also Kil. By learning my language I learned my voice.

As Edōsdi says, “How can we decolonize our minds when we are thinking in the colonizer's language—English?” What I do is language revitalization to work with our rising Indigenous brothers and sisters so they may find their voice—their language.

Alex/Yahlnaaw/Mohammad: Where have you come from? Who are you? And, where are you going?

How can we engage and support our communities, share knowledge and build collaborations?

Debbie: Students are part of an academic community, but also a broader community that provides rich fabric for learning, conducting research, and for sharing our experiences and findings. My personal inspiration has been global. Around the world in classrooms, field camps, remote villages and wild places, I have been motivated and challenged. Rich and diverse experiences have highlighted the value of inclusiveness, different knowledge systems, and unique perspectives. For me, creating strong links across this space is critical for building meaningful relationships, collaborations, and deepening our understanding.

I am a biologist in the Canadian High Arctic, where building relationships can be challenged by different languages, different cultures and even different ways of knowing—challenges that for me have brought immense growth and rich lessons. Inuit have a deep connection to the land with expertise and knowledge that is passed across generations. Once I recognized this—once I understood how meaningful it was to have “many footsteps on the land”—my own world expanded.

What did I learn? That Traditional Knowledge and expertise can be powerful and that including the community in scientific research provides both important and unique information. These insights led me to become more involved in my Arctic and southern communities—sharing knowledge and concerns about wildlife, and eventually developing community-based research programs that recognized local experts and talent. I am a scientist and these programs, from Caribou Health Monitoring with local hunters and Elders, to Bioblitz Waves with student and community experts, recognize our combined strengths, answer our combined questions, and empower our collective communities. Notably, these initiatives laid the foundation for additional community outreach and stewardship programs, and have informed a number of studies including my PhD.

Such win-win situations are powerful but they can be rare. At university, I find that research can literally be trapped in the academic system. That is, maybe we share our research with our labs, our departments, even the academic community, but the bridges are limited and rarely extend across disciplines or to the general public.

But let’s imagine why these bridges are important—how the health of our communities, every one of our nations are affected. For example, the exclusion of science and Traditional Knowledge from policy and planning has been a recurring issue in Canada, the USA, and around the world. This has led to slow action on critical issues like climate change, species at risk, and habitat loss. And - what about the implementation of sound action? How do we get people to act on climate change if their participation is limited? How do we create policy and practices that will be implemented by our governments if the people who vote are not well informed or effectively engaged? Indeed, an informed and engaged public is
necessary - to advance change and impact the very practical and imperative development of sound policy, regulation, and action.

Mike: The pursuit of education in my experience is all about the brain: r-e-t-a-i-n, how much can you retain? And standing out is about your brain being better than other brains. When it comes to exceeding expectations in education, you're going to have to compete for individual success, not collaborate for a prosperous community.

I don't know about you but I tend to renounce my community participation as soon as the first assignment hits each semester. I board up the doors of my room, earplugs in, bye, world.

Knock-knock.

Shhh, I'm trying to memorize this two-way exchange between student and university, where I give financial resources to the institution, which then returns educational resources back to me. I accomplish the work, which I give back to the university, and then they give me my GPA—and if that GPA is good, I can use it as a resource to get back into grad school.

This misses an opportunity for the student to act as a community resource in the learning process. What if students were treated as assets for community rather than mere harvesters of knowledge?

Think about all the social, economic, cultural and ecological projects across Canada and beyond that could swell in potential!

Let me tell you a story. I was 19 years old working as an assistant forestry technician in the West Kootenay. I was given the task of helping chart forestry roads. One morning I came into the office and my employer said we were going to spend the week working on Perry Ridge, and within a few hours we were flying in a helicopter over a blockade led by the Sinixt First Nation to protect their sacred mountain. The fact that the professionals I was working with had studied in post-secondary institutions—many of them locally—and the fact that I was born here and had completed K-12 education here without any idea who the Sinixt were or that this mountain was sacred, points to a shortcoming in many respects. Education is one of them. We grew up with an education system that silenced the voices of the Sinixt First Nation whose territory we were learning on.

So anyways, I quit my job and went to try my own path at post-secondary to see if I could learn to stop perpetuating these colonial injustices and make a difference.

That first difference came in my first community-service learning Peace Studies class at Selkirk College. My professor Myler Wilkinson was the first professor I had who told us the community would be our classroom. He said to go out into the community, listen, and make reconciliation happen; create a transformation large or small and watch it ripple outwards.

So I reached out to members of the Sinixt community, listened to their stories, and collaborated with them on a skateboard, an experiential educational piece that could bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth together in understanding of the deep history of this landscape.
Figure 1. Photo by Mike: By showing a Sinixt family paddling down their highway—the Columbia River—from Frog Mountain in Canada to Kettle Falls in the U.S. portion of their territory, the skateboard hosts a learning journey through this long-established way of life before it was fractured by dams, borders, and reserves.

The ability for post-secondary education to integrate reconciliation and community action with learning goals not only allows students to develop as community leaders—active catalysts for creating tangible difference in the world—but it also helps us discover real-world application for our learning and build networks for our world’s healthier future.

Throughout my degree, I continued to seek out these experiences and, incidentally, I find myself presently participating in a hands-on, community-engaged learning field school project in Lamas, Peru. Given this plenary’s theme of including voices I would like to conclude by presenting some voices from my current field school cohort:

“I found here [in this field school in Peru], I’m less concerned about grades and less concerned about my personal success and more concerned about how I’m impacting the community. So, it’s less of just a teacher-student relationship and more of a student-into-the-community relationship.” —Elise Pullar, fourth-year student, Biology & Environmental Studies

“It has been the coolest thing to actually participate in making biochar. It’s an Indigenous method of improving soil fertility, which also has the potential to sequester carbon and combat global warming—that makes me pretty excited. I find I learn through experience and it’s a completely different thing to learn about, for example, biochar from a book, and then there’s coming here and actually shoveling coconut husks into the oven ourselves and building a fire underneath it, and then watching it come out, seeing the entire process start to finish. It’s pretty transformative, I’d say empowering. It feels doable, because we’ve done it.” —Caleigh Aalders, Second-year Student, English & Environmental Studies

“I’m constantly reading about how the environment and how society can have this relationship, but it’s always been me drawing those connections and
seeing how my disciplines can try and interact. Being on a field school, you don’t have to struggle to make those connections. Those connections are what you’re living.” —Megan Dewar, Fourth-year Student, Sociology & Environmental Studies

“How having that hands-on and integrated experience with the land, it just feels so reconnecting and rejuvenating in a way. And it feels really healthy. It feels really beneficial for my own health and the health of the land to perpetuate the regenerative cycle of the world.” —Logan Richards, First-year Student, Visual Arts & Environmental Studies

How can we ensure the voice of marginalized people are heard and honoured in higher education? (Cara, Chloé, Amy)

Amy: Three years ago I blew my knee out on stage dancing hip hop. I remember how it felt to put my leg down in a step I had done a thousand times before and feel it buckle underneath me like a cardboard accordion. The feeling still makes me shiver with disgust. As I hopped off stage, I knew without a doubt that things were about to change. As it turns out, I needed to have ACL reconstructive surgery, and the timing was such that I would be in the early stages of recovery when I would normally start choreography for dance festival.

The dance world has been very open in recent years to embracing difference. There are studios that have classes dedicated to older dancers and dancers of all body types. But the onus still falls on people to “fit in,” to fit their bodies to a particular type of movement that already exists. This act of accommodation requires that people change who they are. But I want you to think for a moment about how stagnant and limiting accommodation actually is.

From an outsider’s perspective, I probably should have taken the year off to sit in the audience to watch my fellow dancers, and join them for next year’s festival. But that didn’t sit well with me or, as it turns out, my dance teacher. After conversation with myself and two other dancers—one with a shoulder impingement and one with deep anxiety—we showed up at the studio a week post-knee surgery ready to create. Over the course of several months my teacher watched us move together. Our collective limitations forced her to be creative in a way that was completely new. By renegotiating her typical approach to choreography, and allowing herself to be guided by our limitations and movement irregularities, she created something entirely unique, something the world of dance had never seen before. It was made on us. Most importantly, it would not have been possible without our injuries and perceived limitations.

This is the change in perspective that we need when we talk about accessibility in higher education. Though important, it is not enough to ensure that the doors to post-secondary institutions are open to traditionally marginalized populations. It is not enough just to break down the barriers to our classrooms and places of learning. The real paradigm shift occurs when we recognize the true and significant value these perspectives bring to our teaching and learning, the power that lies in difference, and the evolution that will occur when we actively seek out and embrace being broken.

Chloé: I am a national student fellow. I have a degree in English Literature. I graduated with distinction. What if I told you now that I have an intellectual disability? Would it surprise you? SILENCE FOR 5 BEATS. I’ve spent the last several years working with kids with developmental or intellectual disability (I/DD). Every moment I’ve spent with them, I’ve seen their defiance. With an ease I admire, they defy expectations, limitations, and definitions of failure or success.
How can we benefit from the presence of these students in our institutions? Many skeptics believe it is simply too difficult to train professors to manage such differences in their classroom, on top of the tasks they already have to juggle. I argue that inviting students with I/DD into our classrooms represents another type of diversity: neurodiversity. For them, it gives them access to a future that has previously been denied to them. Many of the students I work with have a learned helplessness mentality, repeating such things that have been said to them: “What’s the point? I’m not going to be anybody.”

For many students with I/DD or those on the spectrum, “learning” looks different. Many of the hoops that neurotypical students gladly jump through, even if they are arbitrary, the students with I/DD will not. The duration of learning and understanding a topic is not restricted to a semester, or even a year. These are the students that remind us of lifelong learning. Learning for learning’s sake, and an education that is meaningful beyond theory.

At the end of our plenary at STLHE 2018, a professor stood up and asked the question that we all consider: I recognize these issues, but what can I do about them? What are small, daily steps I can take to contribute to the change?

A disclaimer is needed before I give any answer to this question. I am no expert in educational administration, leadership, or special needs education. The most wonderful thing about working in an autism school is the diversity of students, and understanding why they call it “the spectrum.” No school is alike, no student within those schools is alike. My response to this question is perhaps based on a naïve perspective of the academic world. But I like to think of myself as an optimist.

Universities should edit their admissions standards (especially for those of undergraduate studies) to consider different ways of knowing and learning. Student voice should be prioritized in application procedures, not grades or exam marks.

Evaluation criteria should also be changed to be more inclusive of different learning styles and ways of knowing. Moving towards a pass/fail system, with a more narrative description of the students’ strengths and weaknesses, means a more meaningful recognition of the efforts of the student. It also makes it more likely for the professors to track progress and growth in individual students. In order for this method of evaluation to be possible, class sizes need to be smaller. Education should not be a relationship between 400 students and one professor. It should be a nurturing mentorship.

Addressing these things will make higher education more accessible. It will also make the value of the education more meaningful, critical, and real, not only for those with I/DD, but for all. For the professors, it will make their jobs less impersonal and overwhelming, and more rewarding.

For a lot of people, it is not easy to associate intellectual disability with academic success. What about you? Do you see them in your institutions? Do you make their voices heard and their presence felt?

Cara: “I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change; I am changing the things I cannot accept.” – Angela Davis

I am a biracial woman of color. I have a mental illness. I am a high school drop-out. I am a survivor. My trajectory to graduate school was unconventional to say the least, rapt with barriers both personal and systemic. I have seen first-hand the challenges that marginalized people face in being accepted to and succeeding in the educational system. As a child, I slipped through its cracks. As a teenager I often heard: “you’re a smart kid but you’ve got a bad attitude.” When I was 19, I received my mature high school diploma and entered the post-secondary world where there was the constant battle of balancing supporting myself financially, caring for my mental health and achieving my academic goals.
Then I began working in child welfare, sexual violence and community mental health. All I knew was that I wanted to help people, I had no idea that these experiences would completely change my life and who I was, and how I saw both these things. There were times when experiences like these impacted my own academic performance and mental health. I often found myself feeling angered, discouraged and hopeless. This compounded with my own struggles, illuminating areas of my life I had denied for years and forcing me to confront them. Every so often I came across a client who I saw myself and my story in, and what would inevitably follow was the deep throb of survivor’s guilt. I would think: I could have been you. I was you. I survived, but why? Not only did I survive but I am thriving. I am strong. I am resilient. Why? Why me?

While I do give some small credit to my own perseverance for making it this far, this question was answered through working with survivors of sexual violence and those in the child welfare system. It was here where the areas in which I do have privilege were illuminated. I am half-white and have light-skinned privilege. My family does not have a history of colonization in Canada. I was never in the child welfare system or incarcerated. I am able-bodied. I am university educated. I am neurotypical. Even my opportunity to be present with survivors through their journey was a privilege. I learned that these privileges and many others contributed to my success and well-being in ways that are completely inaccessible to those with less. And that my privilege must be used to lift up the voices of others. To quote Spiderman’s uncle, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

However, my voice is often louder than others’ and so at times must be quieted. It is important to remember that while our voices as educators, students, and leaders are valuable and can be used to support marginalized students, we are not the experts. Our own voices must be quieted at times as the experiential voice is invaluable and must be honoured. They know better than anyone the challenges they face and what they need to remedy them. Because I have my own experiential voice I can speak to the needs of my communities as I see them, but I cannot speak for everyone or for the communities of others, and nor should I. I can only tell my own truth and be grateful that I am in a position where I have the freedom and opportunity to do so.

Grounded in my own experiences and the stories my clients shared with me, I propose the following solutions with the aim of reconciling the gap between marginalized and privileged students while also addressing the larger systemic issues of inaccessibility and institutionalized discrimination.

1. The admissions criteria should be revised to acknowledge and honor alternative ways of knowing and learning, including those based in community, culture and experience.
2. Include a section in the application where marginalized applicants (and only marginalized applicants) may discuss the barriers they’ve faced, how this motivates them and has made them stronger.
3. A mandatory undergraduate class on diversity and inclusivity with an experientially-based curriculum taught by graduate students who identify as marginalized.

Cara/Amy/Chloé: In ecology the edges are where the most diversity occurs. Walking along the edge where a forest meets a valley you will see difference flourishing. Species on the edge of extinction offer the most hope for genetic diversity. The same is true for the world of teaching and learning. There is so much promise and strength that lies in difference and diversity. So, the real question is: how do we bring the edges to the center?

Final Thoughts

Our journey together has been insightful and transformative, and has highlighted the rich opportunities that exist within the education system and the many voices that have yet to be heard. We
compare education to healthy ecosystems and suggest that diversity is essential to build a powerful, resilient and inclusive academic system. *This is the essence of our collective story*—the unearthing of our many communities and their invaluable contribution to our individual and collective education.

We know that breaking down the barriers between academia and community is possible. But currently, our academic degrees seem to be more like the slow stretching of a slingshot that sends us hurling into a much separate world once we graduate. So we advocate that the edge between these two worlds—university and community—should be the rich space where learning takes place. Success in the classroom should not be separate from success in the community.

We ask, what can each of us do, as students, as teachers, as administrators, and as an institution as a whole, to create an education system that sends us out to make a better world during our studies without having to put our academic standing on the line? What can we do to ensure that no groups are marginalized and that “diversity, health and wellbeing” is central to our education system and thus the world at large?

Here are just a few ideas:

1. **Support for wellness in the Academy:** encourage students, colleagues, and faculty to turn off on the weekends, practice self-care, to create balance and sustainability.

2. **Develop scholarships and entrance awards for marginalized groups who articulate their unique story.** Ensure that accessibility is one of the main goals in recruitment efforts. This means actively changing our communication approach and recruiting other ways of knowing to influence and inform the process.

3. **Encourage the sharing and practicing of knowledge beyond the classroom.** Provide opportunities for community-based research and initiatives. Provide support for participation or leadership in community/national/international working groups, and invite the public into our academic institutions for thesis defenses, research discussions, or for information and sharing about some of the leading issues of our time, e.g., climate change, clean water, human rights, reconciliation, the loss of wildlife and biodiversity.

4. **Encourage and support experiential learning,** recognizing the value of local and Indigenous knowledge systems and hands-on-experience.

Today, perhaps more than ever before, the future of our world requires deep understanding and knowledge. And, we know that education is powerful, and inclusive education is yet more powerful. So, in the words of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai, “*We (I) raise up our voice—not so we (I) can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard...we cannot succeed when half of us are held back.*”

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